Signet

Signet 2009

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Poetry

Nicole Beno

Is just like any other animal
Instinct.

Mount your prey.

Devour your offspring.

Regurgitate whatever
you can't digest.

Turn on! Tune in! Drop out!

Travis Mullis

Timothy Leary tickles the silver bellies of the live oaks
across the way from my oyster shucked porch.

His arms swing a Tarzan rhythm
to the sonic boom of a sheep skin moon.

Look at his monsoon armpit jungles, sweat soaked and,
tangled in the Harvard tweed and New England accent.

He put his brain in a brown paper bag
and threw it to the false prophets of Hare Krishna,
those ramshackle wanderers of heroin-coated highways
and lily white subway-sucking afternoons.

You have become a bloodied arm in a meat grinder,
manifesting flies with tie die sweaters.

Look westward, man of Massachusetts.
the sun is setting below the waist of Atlas.
Tubes of light make Jacob's ladders
on my small beating heart as I watch your sad carcass dance.

your generation has shriveled to a peach pit in a bed pan, Mr. Leary.
So, dance now my cymbal monkey
and float down the food chain on a trail of
wannabe beatnik poets licking the pavement of a California sunset.

your revolution was merely
a thumb of your nose,
a tip of your hat,
a nod of your chin.

Max Heck

Carissa Orlando

Max Heck, yes, you might say I knew him well,
Although I haven't seen him in a while—
Not since he left to move out west and try
To force his crappy acting on LA.
No, I haven't yet forgiven him for that.
We were quite the pair of artists, he and I;
In pairs, I thought, no artist had to starve.

I heard about his girl out there, that whore
Who holds the pole and gets him off for free.
I heard his brother say he'd marry her,
But he's certain it was she who gave him crabs.
And now he's in the sticky part of town,
Where dirt and spiders crawl between his toes.
His hair must touch his back, at least, by now,
Waiting for roles for which it must be cut.
Close? Well, yes, you could say we were close,
But now I hope the bastard burns in hell.

The Dancer

Allison Mehaffey

My hipbones grind against wooden planks
as I roll onto my stomach.
I lie prostrate, smelling sweat, inhaling hair
and my arms slide upward, caressing the floor,
but they are deceitful.
They are actually trying to tear themselves
from a body unworthy of their grace.
It lacks the strength to make its arms obey.

When I've spread myself like honey on the floor,
and I've met every speck of grit clinging to my skin,
I force liquid through my unruly limbs
and peel myself up,
curving each link of my spine
until my back keens,
and I stare at blank ceiling tiles.

If you were watching,
you would not see the furrows in my brow
as I fight to believe that the rivulets
of sticky drips
traipsing
down my breast
are beads of seawater.

As I emerge from a hardwood sea
for a first glimpse of the fluorescent bulb of night,
you'd be entranced by a silver leap ending in a splash,
as a sea-bound creature tries and fails to fly.

Dancing at a Ranch in Paris

Leslie Pitman

I am the creak
of the rusty door,
the cut-out moon
on the wooden outhouse,
the thick, grey shroud
of smoke burning my eyes.

I am the soft pink mesh
smelling of lilac detergent,
the black cotton clinging tight
to my pint-sized frame,
the small canvas slipped
snug around my pointed feet.

I am my stomach's deep drop,
the plane ascending,
a Paris postcard with a glowing Eiffel Tower,
my home address on the label.
I am the lovers at the café,
fingers dancing to the street
band's blissful melody.

Decision

Elizabeth Heffner

A million thoughts locked inside
aching for their release.
A stubborn mind
refuses to realign
and let agony cease.
You've got me twisted
under my skin
I can't stop falling
in love with sin.
Temptations explode
and Lust collides
with the promises
of faerie tales
and happy ever afters--
sweet nothings perched
on branches set to sail.
What would you wish me to do--
bottle this essence of euphoria
and sacrifice for all,
or simmer infectiously
in undulating pleasure-
just you and I?
You know I'm no martyr
yet compassion spikes again--
perhaps it is better to have loved
and lost then to have never loved at all?
.....Nay, such a phrase beholds
the blackest kind of blasphemy,
for each rendering second past
the tantalizing spectrum of love
leaves your heart in a state of
continuous torture--
bitterly expunging each and every shard
of memory a once beloved captured
then guiltily reabsorbing it
all the while knowing that this process
repeatedly ravages what
tattered shreds of love and affection
your afflicter left behind.
So still I find myself
in this Limbo of emotions
stubbornly clinging to the past,
petrified of unknowing loss
of what's to come.
A million thoughts locked inside
aching for their release.
A frightened girl still wondering
if such pain will ever cease.

'll name it something sensational late

Sydney Zuerlein

A bit old-fashioned, but I'm still quite sure
a man should woo his love, not have her chase
her swain, yet the skittish hare, in our case,
pursues the careless hound. The elf maid cures
the love she bears the Shoemaker; she makes
the shoes, herself a slave – though not to love
but hope; and hopes the love she's earned will break
like waves that crash upon a quiet cove.

My dear Odysseus, I've turned Calypso
on our friendship, for fear you'd sail away,
I've plowed the field wherein the famed pearl lay
for Six years – it's time to let it fallow.

Awake, my caged lion, to jubilee.
I've flung the door wide – I've set you free.

Love and Loathing

Molly Rose Nass

On the crowded corner of First and Beverly Streets I
skip to keep up with your lumbering steps. Again
my hand looks like a child's as you pull it forward.
With the lamppost as our spotlight
your kiss is as shallow as a high school love poem,
meant more for the audience around us than for me.

American Love in 14 Lines

Travis Mullis

Love is a bastard in rags who sits on
your stoop and waits, drooling Shakespeare's sonnets.
I am gonna fuck you so hard, baby.
Son, I love your mom, but were getting divorced.
Hey Joe? Can we talk? I am pregnant, Joe.
I miss you Andy. Tank you vedy much, foreign man.
My stepfather choked me, and I took it.
Love is the son driving 90 miles per hour
as his mom clutches her chest, crying help.
Hey Jean. Frank found Greg, he has gone away.
The lawnmower crushed his skull, Jean. He's gone.
I stood there Trav. I stood there, and I laughed.
It's all a joke. We are just living it.
Grammy, I miss you now. Forgive my sins.

Seductive Nature

Lauren DeReese

The moon kissed orchids glowed in the darkness.
Sea water rushed in on itself, over and under
as her body whispered softly, Yes.

Nocturne birds in Kukui trees had sung
hymns before, but now filled them with wonder
at the orchids glowing in the darkness.

Hawaiian air hung thick in their lungs,
while in the distance there was thunder
as her body whispered softly, Yes.

Safely, the lovers were hidden among
the tall trees and watched over by golden embers
and the moon kissed orchids in the darkness.

While youth endures and the night is young,
let nothing on this earth deter
as her body whispered softly, Yes.

The natives at times say in their ancient tongue,
What nature has brought together let no man blunder.
While the moon kissed orchids glowed in the darkness,
her body whispered, softly, Yes.

Thus Do We Reach the Stars

Justin Lafreniere

Taillights look like the retreating
Red eyes of alien invaders as they flee through the dark
Tunnel of the interstate. The trees
Shift in the breeze, creating a channel for the road
Black as a mile-deep sea. I am running through Richmond.
River City. Richmond. We,
My father and I,
Pass that tobacco monolith once more.

A summer ago I'd been here
And passed that tower
At dusk.
Against the dirty tan sunset,
The high red stripe looks
Like a tear of blood mixing in western dust.
She smokes
A Cowboy killer
With the window down
Before looking at me, smiling.

Four-cylinders moved me both times,
The pistons pushing a galloping rhythm.
On the second journey, I slept
Curled in the passenger seat
With a faded hat pulled over my eyes
To block out that southern sun red as
In my dreams, I heard her say,
"I always wanted to smoke a Marlboro
As I drove past the factory."

She blows the smoke out, lips twisted for a ring.
It curls slowly, but it never ends,
Growing a trail of smog
That overtakes the whole car, stretches out
The open window.
It's a lasso that could pull down the world,
I swear. But it shrinks,
Seeps back into her throat, squeezes on the pink
Of her pulsing lungs or maybe the nicotine-slowed heart.

She breathes deeply and I blink into a new world.
I can see her sitting astride a saddle,
Clicks her lips like a kiss and the horse the color of my hair
Stirs beneath her. Pulling the reigns, she gallops
Away towards the sunset.
Her skin is the color of roots and dried sagebrush.

My father taps the breaks, pitches me forwards
Against the dash.
Her dress, her eyes were black as suicide
When she smoked Reds in the Capital of the South.
Falling back asleep,
She greets me with a six-shooter, whispers
Sic Itur Ad Astra and fires.

Dragon Slayer

Johnathan Pennington

I am the dragon-slayer.
Eater of worlds
Insatiably breaking down
Rarity.

Heretofore unknown to this new epoch and
Relegated to monotony.
My sword dulls
My armor rusts.

Ere today
Cerberus lay slain betwixt my greaves.
Gorgons cracked under the
Strain of my skill.

Tomorrow remains a bitter reminder
Of the lackluster days
To follow.

Consigned to nothing
Goodbyes don't matter.

Heart Ink

Joel Ferdon

Heavy pages on hard fingers produce
Ink on pages to skin, soft skin
Drool words to make pretty pictures for
Vaulted ceilings of oblique paintings

God rested and the old man works
Brittle bones sing church hymns to
Wailing children, it's only sun up for
One day at a time for every rhyme

Backwards words for her
Gorgeous lobotomy of the
English dictionary, she's so pretty
For capturing the ruby frame

Heart shaped words never
Started the injustice, just ended it
And all the pretty smiles never
Compared to one of hers.

Inventing the ferris wheel for you

Travis Mullis

figures in the sand, two.
watching red fade to purple fade to black, i am alone.
so, i see us in the two by the pair of tidal claws.
i invent their stories as i invent ours.
as you sleep comfortably far from where i write.
like inventing the ferris wheel for you.
i will write our story in them.
he a coward with a funny laugh,
she a shy, excited, mystery.
locking fingers in palms they
sway to the rhythm of the moons pull
on a beach two miles wide.
together they are a smiling mouth and winking eye.
a bloody eyed poet on a stoop and sawdust perch
dissects and dismembers their lives.
he rolls his tongue on their dreams, their hopes.
he is a writer with a love to give.
on the weekends he has long dreams where he walks to a waterfall,
looks in, falls in, eyes closed to ice water swirls, drowns,
wakes up alone with ready made tears and self pity.
she is an artist with a heart and a mind and a soul, but...

and the poet cannot fill the blank, doesn't know how.
and the somersaulting words find no rubber mat.
his message falls too short,
as he sinks into the solemn misery of unshared sheets.
who's he kidding, he doesn't know her, only hopes to.
and in the late night hours he thinks of her and wishes he had seen the writing on the wall.
the glint in the corner of her eye.
his night is never ending , flipping his mind in bloodied puddles.
and he cannot find the words to express his budding love.
the shadow walkers creep the cellars of his heart as he exhales and falls alone again.

A Darker Shade of White

Melissa Wilds

Sweet-scented incense
floods the room, permeating
even the floorboards.
This small floor fills with people,
eyes blurred. Some laugh too loudly, one
is deathly still.

I sit, left of center,
and watch our long-haired daughters
brush aside bouquets
of ivory chrysanthemums,
and kindly kiss your picture;
worn cloth brushing pine boards.

I catch myself thinking of you,
and despair.
White was your favorite color
and, darling, I'm wearing it for you now.

The ring on my left hand,
grows colder by the hour.
The sky weeps through a window,
tears falling from ashen clouds.

Hurricane Season

Sydney Zuerlein

You were away all summer
In a sky-high tower in Beijing –
Now hurricane season brings
Its buckets and buckets of rain
And within these four walls
Of ivy-covered brick
I sit, drenched, delighting
In the raindrops' plops
On the romantic tea pot
And delicate tea cups, while the sky
Sheds its tears.

Spring came
To free our friendship,
Bound in the ice of a three-ring binder
But you set sail, bound for Asia.
Now you've returned
And in the new, swifter flow
Of a life, that fits you
Like a business suit,
You've stowed
Old loves and open wounds
In the bottom of your brief case.

The warm rain hitting my face
Reminds me it will be hot
Even at the end of September,
When the sun smiles again,
When the palms
Cease failing their arms.
If you find the time,
If you remember,
We might skinny-dip
In all that water under the bridge –
I'll recite odes and elegies in Old English
You'll forgive me in Old French,
We'll make Pig Latin
The language of our larks,
And peregrinate, wearing rope sandals,
Plucking minute harps.

Then, far into the starry night,
We'll sit cheek to cheek, lip to lip,
With cups and cups of tea at out fingertips

The wind drives the rain slant –
I see myself,
On an autumn evening,
Lingering at the kitchen table
Swirling my sorrowful tea.
Down in the valley now,
The trees are lonely, their leaves
Flown toward the placid, watercolor sky.

Voices in Trees

Justin Barker

The leaves carry our voices though we make no sound;
the silence fills the gaps between us in the air.
It is beneath the woven branches where I knew I found

a slight change in the fractured light that falls around.
Your words rest on your tongue, and it is now that you dare
the leaves to carry our voices. You still make no sound.

I train my eyes only to make contact with the ground—
afraid to look up and discover you not sitting there.
But it was beneath the woven branches that I knew I found

the reason why I always saw myself more bound
to your silent presence, and why you couldn't bear
for the leaves to carry our voices though we never made a sound.

I discovered your lack of presence when the pound
of silence danced through the trees into my ear.
Then beneath the woven branches I knew I found

a way to let go of all the moments that surround
two years of my memory, until I learn where
the leaves carry our voices. So I listen for their sound
beneath the woven branches trying to remember what I found

Meaning

Carissa Orlando

A meaningless world is more than I'll bear,
So I take out my pen and sketch in my own creed.
I assign meaning when none may be there.

There are stories in silence, insults in glares,
Novels in the spaces between words that I read;
A meaningless world is more than I'll bear.

A homeless man drunk, a torrid affair
Are my lessons for children and warnings to heed.
I assign meaning when none may be there.

When lives are ruined and war is declared,
Peace, I say, will soon follow its bloodthirsty lead.
A meaningless world is more than I'll bear.

The eyes of my lover, his cold, thoughtless stare
Speaks words of sweet loving, immeasurable need.
I assign meaning where none may be there.

And your End, its finality, its potent despair,
is heart-smashing Nothing into which you recede.
A meaningless death is more than I'll bear,
So I assign meaning when none may be there.

Crystalline

Elizabeth Heffner

Crystalline angels spiral
from charred skies
swimming across the
stratospheric lair.
A life span unknown
for its Fate which
contemplates
whether their
plunge is yet
another death wish.
Land quivers in anticipation
for its ivory crystal blanket.
Twirling
down
down
down
Oh so peacefully
without a sound
save for the wind
tinged with mint
whispering sweetly
a forewarning.
Leafy creatures
now enshrouded
mangled by its
surprising weight.
Ebony stardust
fades to light.
footsteps flutter
across the icy terrain
crunching swiftly
under the land of
untainted.

In the Summer Heat

Janeen Bradley

Amber brown hay bales sit lined up against
the fence of barbed wire and rusted metal posts.
I grip rough baling twine, heaving upward,
perching on one ton of dried orchard grass,
red clover, and alfalfa, freshly mown.

Crackling stalks of grass scrape my knees and shins;
summer's sun burns my face and shoulders brown.
I stand slowly, breathing dust and dampness,
then I jump, boots ripping into tight bales,
scattering hay and flinging mud, landing hard
on the neighboring bale, scrabbling for purchase,
gasping, laughing, sweating in the summer heat.

The sun slowly wanes as I clamber and play;
mother comes to call me down from the field.
I wash up for dinner, boots left by the door,
but the sun's heat still burns under my skin.

The Mix-tape

Amanda LoRocco

From script to sole, Kelly's Converse looked bruised
Known for preferring guitar chords to company
Blue pen lyrics made up for her other tongues lack of character
You would never notice Kelly within the
labyrinth of lockers, liars and magazine mannequins
Glancing down at her mood-changing nail polish
was more interesting than conversation
Her headphones outlined a screenplay of emotions
better than words she could ever truly act upon or say

Jay was always cynical, and never shut up.
From the pen placed strategically behind his ear
to his comic sketchbook dubbed "Calculous notes"
He was known for wearing his days-of-the-week shirts on the wrong day.
Yet there was something he did consistently,
obviously trying to be subtle, but desperately obvious
Jay tried to catch Kelly's attention...
Only her assorted stickers covered marble notebooks
with band names as recognizable as bumper stickers said more,

Monday was usually just a shrug of the shoulder
Tuesday if he was lucky a sideways smile
Wednesday always was the two finger salute
Thursday her sarcastic roll of the eyes before bursting out into a laugh
Friday was the day he was going to get inside her headphones.

Tired of keeping her playlist of thoughts to herself
Monday Kelly shrugged off the idea
Tuesday let her smile to herself about the silliness of it
Wednesday realized the need to be brave enough to follow through
Thursday played it cool before she realized she had to be herself
Friday was the day she was going to take off her headphones

Friday's surprise can't explain Kelly's wired eyes
Jay handed her a mix-tape called "Canvas"
Biting back a laugh at her hesitation
He grabbed the mix-tape from her index-fingers pause
titled 'Expression'.

His Expression
Track 1 was an instant connection, the missing kaleidoscope of conversation,
Track 2 a slight twist of heartbeat that radiated in her head
Track 3 had more hook, the bass became bridge between heart and string
Track 4 replacing her sole canvas wasn't hard, it was a familiar feeling as writing to hers
Track 5 Kelly decided no more pulling away this mix-tapes tides vibe had a hold on h

Her Canvas
Track 1 was like jumping on the bed, Jay couldn't stop bouncing
Track 2 Flicking a frisbee of senses in his head, sugar-rushed veins needed to catch a bre
Track 3 Puzzles of clouds sensing subtle changes like the speed of a playground swin
Track 4 Expressive Rock Ballad only the epic super-hero saving the damsel in distress co
could match
Track 5 Electrocuted spent, this static spark wasn't going away anytime soon

Friday nights mix-tapes where like splattered paint
An explosion of senses either could contain
So what do you say after such a confession.
"I didn't mean what you thought it meant"
or
"Don't read to much into it?"
Jay could never call Kelly and say,
"Saturday, What are you doing?"

So the mix tapes spin
and the words go around
their High School love affair
was played out loud.

For my black, brown, sick, crazy and furry friends

Eli Narwhal

hat i feel is a long rattling cough down a dinosaur bone.
wind carried paper kite caught on a barbed wire fence.
onvicts playing craps in a Baltimore slum.
ows pecking the flesh of a mule freshly killed by a hateful neighbor.

hat i feel is a Jackie Robinson baseball coming loose into acrylic dust
n the bench of a deserted Central Park.
screaming whore flat backed on the oil slick of a parking garage.
vo tons of explosives sending shrapnel through the disease riden limbs of a Sudanese child.

hat i feel is a polar bear pelt mounted on the wall of an investment banker.
snake sliding through the temples of my grandfather's skull.
pril pedals crushed beneath the boots of a high school shooter.
erflowing sewers of fish heads and monkey brains in downtown Hong Kong.

hat i feel is the brand of a master on the neck of a Mississippi slave.
e swaying of a schizophrenic on the rock of Gibraltar.
adless Trojans wading in the salt of the Aegean.
ool on the chin of a seizing epileptic fond of japanimation.

hat i feel is a people insulated and cold shouldered to the world.
hat i feel doesn't matter for i am just another capitalist dissatisfied
d sitting in an armchair crying for my friends so easily forgotten.

Hot Cocoa

Leslie Pitman

Pasty blue paint stuck between your fingers,
under your nails; your hands were tucked away
in graduation photos. You just laughed.
Those poles and tiny hooks: "cast it out,
like this." Fishing lessons, the Bahamas;
you caught a shark the day after I left.
The goddess-checked footwear, your heart beating
so fast I could see it, shorts shorter than mine.
Your father's bellow, garage scattered with roach eggs
and tools: he used to teach you how to use them.
Your mother's sideway glance and gentle stare.
Chocolate powder, whole milk, spoon, and mallows:
Hot cocoa tasted better than your lips.

Life Before Cereal

Carissa Orlando

Was there life before cereal
For Cap'n Crunch?
As a plump-cheeked recruit,
Freshly dressed and ready to serve,
He must not have dreamt of
Sweetened oats in milky mush.
He must have desired to rise in rank
And rule the troops one day.

That is, before the accident.
It must have been a bone
--a leg or foot, something to crunch—
That got him receiving pension checks
Instead of orders, gaining weight
Instead of gaining rank.
The hands of the clock must have slowed to a crawl.
Then the offer came,
And soon he was standing before red backgrounds,
White-knuckled around a silver spoon,
Showing tongue and teeth
To prospective consumers.

It must have been the commercials he hated most,
Nothing like battle,
With mind-numbing music and dancing children
Painted all colors of the rainbow.
This was probably when he started drinking.

Now with his box-front total at four,
He sips at whiskey in the mornings,
Staring at frothy water from his beach-front suite
And collecting paychecks by the bowl.
And while he's got the execs at Quaker snapping salutes
And some young flake to nibble his berries,
It is very possible
That the only inkling of pleasure he feels
Is from cutting the mouths of children as they chew.

A Wandering Mind

Milke N. Abag

No teacher is forthcoming.
The class like bees are humming.
We wait for her,
She will come sure,
But I'd rather be in Vancouver.

We students all study hard.
Our brains are turning to lard.
So much to know,
The mind will grow,
But I'd rather be in Vancouver.

She finally shows her face-
Flustered, but with certain grace.
Ready to teach,
Learning to reach,
But I'd rather be in Vancouver.

Hours and hours roll by.
The class is starting to sigh.
Preparation-
Th'destination,
But I'd rather be in Vancouver.

Clocks gladly announce the time.
Ignorance now is the crime.
We're free to leave,
We did achieve,
And now I can go to Vancouver.

The Shaving of the Collaborators

Photograph: Montélimar, France, August 1944

Janeen Bradley

Her hair floats slowly down,
soft curls like dandelion fluff,
suspended in the air,
then falls gently to the dust.
Her uncle, a member of la Résistance,
drags the blade over her scalp,
scraping bared raw skin;
blood pools with sweat,
runs down her neck,
absorbed into the cotton dress.

She sits clutching the bench.
The town butcher turns her face,
posing her for the camera.
His hands smell of rotting meat
and the cheap tobacco of his cigarette,
clenched in the corner of his mouth.
He exhales and the smoke
burns her eyes.

Fully shorn, she stares
numbly past the camera lens
as the butcher smears the swastika
in cows' blood on her forehead.
Though soon she will be forced
into a wagon with the others
to be driven – paraded -
through her liberated village,
for now she waits there,
branded, watching her curls
ground into the mud
under the wagon wheel.

Pillar

Justin Barker

She matches step for step the man who told
her not to look back. Her legs growing tired,
she falls behind him, starting to acquire
soft blisters on her feet. She must withhold
complaint and command herself to act bold,
and once she glances behind, she feels the fire
peel away her flesh: salt starts to mire
her bones as one tear forms, and she turns cold.

But Lot treads on; his eyes trained on the ground
and on his neck burns Sodom's bloodied flame.
He lost his will to call her; he makes no sound.
Now, his wife, just a stack of flaked salt bound
to the earth, and he drops his head in shame
for leaving her behind, a white, cracked mound.

The pistol, the painter, the field

Travis Mullis

i wonder what he saw that morning,
if the clouds galloped across the sky,
and if they looked like flamenco dancers.
morning dew collected in puddles between his toes.
the reflection of the sun on the nickel of the pistol
as he stared forward to yellow fields.

i wonder what he felt?
if a breeze blew back the bristles of his thinning red hair.
if the bright tulip petals nuzzled his finger tips.
if God made no wind that day,
if the sun was cold steel and cruel to touch,
if the layers of caked mud rose up his legs.
if tulip petals cracked and dried fell to dirt.

i wonder what that pistol felt like in his hand,
the two pounds of nickel, steel and ammunition.
could he see in his mind the trigger being pulled,
his lungs contorting, his mind a blank canvas.
i wonder what he looked like as he blinked his eyes, lifted his hand,
the hand that had painted the hills and valleys of the spirit.
as he brought that weapon to a resting place upon his beating heart,
and the moments of his overwhelming genius, seeped out into the frozen French field.

the shot rang out across the countryside, not yet dead,
bleeding into the Earth, the tulips swayed not knowing what had happened.
He rose and carried himself to his bedroom.

for two days he laid there leaking out his life into white linen sheets.
his thoughts curdled in a misty stew and he clutched his riddled chest.
his hands were clutched over the hole the bullet made, brother Theo at his side,
as the swirling dust of dusk settled upon the barrel of the pistol in that French field
he found these words to say to his brother,
"The sadness will last forever."

Grandfather Clock

Lauren DeReese

The glassy face glinted in the darkened room,
flashing brighter with each passing candle.
Watching the solemn procession of people
marching on their way to pay last respects.
Down the ever expanding hall, onward
until they finally reached his stiff form.
All seemed well, but without checking,
with cheeks still warm he was then hoisted up
on the long pine board, and carried him past
the grandfather clock. With each moment
the clock ticked to warn, or maybe, simply
clucked just to scorn the false pretense of the
mourning passing before its blank face, yet
silent the halls remained. So lamenters
in dark garb carried him stained in the blame
of their eager discard. Just one step more,
for the furnace doors to receive his form.

My Mother's Mother

Allison Mehaffey

My mother's mother was a real seamstress.
A child of the depression,
she could make her own patterns.
She could transform schoolgirls into Victorian ladies,
teenagers into beauty queens,
and grown-up daughters into brides.

The seamstress died this summer.
No iron could smooth her last, wrinkled gown.
My mother and I
watched as her threadbare flesh
languished in a blue room
butterflied with greeting cards.
My mother rubbed her withered hands
and crooned familiar lullabies
when the tumor that was unraveling her scalp
kept her from sleeping.

After the funeral,
my mother came home to a sewing task
that I had given her.
She ripped at seams
a true seamstress could have sewn straighter.
I watched my mother's face as it faded,
turned sallow like old pattern-paper.
I watched as time spun a little girl
who hadn't been seen since the late '60's.

And when she wrapped
herself around me,
crying, clinging
to my skinny breast for comfort,
my hand, unbidden, lifted
to stroke her graying hair,
to pat the familiar stooped shoulder.
I had become
my mother's mother.

What it Means to Hear the Words, "Your Mother is Dying."

Eli Narwhal

The long dark vapor of night accumulates on the windowpanes of the hospital window, and I have settled into a sagging leather chair to listen to my mother's long and hard breaths. Her cotton gown has become torn in the chest and I cover her with my jacket. She who was the little girl in overalls chasing my aunt through red clay in 1957. I see her at 23, married to the scum in a blue pastel tuxedo. I want to tell her that she is making a terrible mistake. He will do terrible things to you. You will be left with scars and an empty house. She who was bright faced and blond holding my B.B.'s knees next to the newly planted oak now one hundred feet tall. I see her at 27, clutching her mothers hand as her breathing becomes difficult. I want to tell her it will get better. To tell her that mortality is the burden we bear. She who was seated at the table for all of my Great Aunt's canasta tournaments. I see her at 56, crying in a Presbyterian pew, telling me her heart is exploding, driving at 80 miles per hour to the long sterile halls of a hospital. I can hear the blood flow in my ears as Dr. Long Face tells me, "Your mother is dying". The long rays of morning spread across my mother's face as the sun rises above the waist of atlas. I open my eyes to a flat green line and the whizz of automated lungs going haywire. Nurses rush in to save a life as I run down the hall in an undershirt and sweatpants. She who was the smiling blonde in the satin prom dress. I run and imagine all that is possible. Her eyes open as I try to find the right words.

Goodbye

Elizabeth Heffner

Once more I'll say goodbye
to the memories
you resurrect--
I'm not going through
another crucifixion
of my past.
Why do you continue
to haunt me with
your guilt--
it was you who couldn't
seem to last.
Dissolved within the
sands of time,
you faltered.
Submerged within
the depths of sublime
I wish to stay.
Yet you skim the
waters and retrieve
the promises you
never would believe.
Wait, now you
want a second chance?
To repair the wounds
exchanged?
I'm sorry love,
but you must
think I'm deranged
to dare risk myself once more,
to be shattered to the core.

Kiss the Scars

Joel Ferdon

I kiss the scars and she
Makes me laugh a little more
Makes me swear I've done it before
She says come a little closer to hear
She says she's on her way to much, much more

Making me promise is forever
Or so she said to me
She ran so far she could only see
The blood on her hands and her conscience
On me

Hey ya miss, can you spare some love
I once felt like you were here
The day is done, the stars are your light
And all I have to say is goodbye
Tonight.

Untitled

Kendall Kucab

I stare,
Hatefully into the bathroom mirror.
The running mascara alone
Betrays the riotousness of my emotions.
As daylight segues into night,
The darkness weighs heavily against my soul.
This heart suffocates with each additional beat,
Trapped within its once protective cage.
The silence amplifies a lover's absence and
My pulse beating in my ears.
Alleviation comes as the water falls,
And the humidity clouds more than just the mirror.

On Ass

Sydney Zuerlein

A poet said, or had a learned constable
Declare, "Remember that I am an ass,
Although it be not written down, do not
Forget I am an ass." Remember, Lord,
I am an ass. What more is there to say?
I do not want your rod—I will not lie
In green pastures or mosey by still streams.

I'm grunting Eeyore, tale that hangs by just
A nail, beneath a stable house of twigs.

Dear Lord, you ride on backs of asses, though
I don't profess to be as good an ass
As Balaam's was. Yet Bottom dreamt, or thought
He did, he'd loved the fairy queen, so Lord,
Give me a dream of immortality,
That I may leave behind my house of twigs.

You know I am an ass, but you can make
A lollygagging clover-munching ass
Into a holy Jesus-bearing ass.

Crash

Elizabeth Heffner

Night comes crashing down
Spraying darkness--smothering light
All the potential possibilities
All the evil you tried to fight
Groping--Advancing--
Pulling itself upright.

Streetlights cracked and bruised
Rusted shavings, broken fuse
Scraped asphalt-a dying flicker
Hiding the lies in the crackling snickers
Your body curled in the shadows
Drained from whiplash
From the evil of Night's demonic stance.

Head reeling, mind spinning
How could Night's evil possibly be winning?
You'd come so far in this slippery dance
Then so abruptly darkness had overcome in a glance.
Coming to a crouch--you pause--hesitate--
Evil and Darkness conversing with no haste
Their eyes pooling in lofty and wicked desire
At the chaos left to rip from the seams--
The capture of the Sun
And the erasing of memories--
Of once pleasant dreams.

Ignoring the dribbling
Of crimson on cream
Flesh knows its path
To avoid unwanted seams.
Still flickering--
Still pulsing--
Some fight still remains
Slinking over to the duo
Unaware--unannounced,
Your knife slits their throats
And you murmur,
"The nightmare you killed
Still is lurking about".

The Ride

Janeen Bradley

I'm in the back seat of his car,
a derelict automobile held together
by a collage of political bumper stickers,
and I'm the only one of the five passengers
wearing a seat belt.

I perch on the upholstery;
the smell of cigarette smoke
has seeped into the seats,
and the musky scent of marijuana
mixes with the fruity perfume of my deodorant.
I begin to sweat.

On the interstate, we play Mario Cart
with Mercedes and 18-wheelers,
weaving between the lanes,
the driver beating time like Charlie Watts
on the steering wheel.

He's dipped in ink, his throat, chest and arms,
painted in primary colors, stylized words, and scenes of violence:
layers of bleeding skulls, spider webs on his elbows,
four of a kind - aces, and a pirate vessel in flames.
He has a name, but I've forgotten it.
I call him Gambit.
He sports the X-Men logo
in the web between his left thumb and forefinger.
His hair is bright blue
and his eyes are jaundiced yellow and bloodshot.

The redlight is a welcome sight.
We lurched to a stop: he yells
"Chinese firedrill!"
and the others scramble out the doors.
I fumble with my seat belt
then wobble out into the left turn lane
and keep walking.

Untitled #000

Justin Lafreniere

bob dylan is judas.
From the passenger seat, she told me:
"Play it fucking loud."
Blonde on blonde blasting on the broken speakers
And the wind carries the lyrics backwards
Like paper airplanes in a hurricane.
Highway 61 revisited, back to where I used to play
My father's old Martin at bars on Desolation Row.

my father is a silent guitar.
He'd leave that leather-bound book of fold songs
Open on the living room table for days on end.
One of those nights, he said:
"I traded music for love."
My mother would whistle in the kitchen;
He'd smile back, even if she couldn't see it.
I was too young to understand that every song
Is for someone, until a violet-eyed girl
Waited for me behind a rundown pub
With her hands in her back pockets
And two train tickets for New Orleans.

john lennon is jesus.
Heading north from New Orleans,
We never spoke in the car, but listened
To black ribbon bootlegs of the Great White Wonder.
On the backseat was my father's Martin
And his songbook. Halfway to St. Louis
And papa's pine box that has been six feet under
Since nineteen ninety-six, we rented a motel room.
She would talk about how she missed Asbury Park.
Stroking her hair, I told her:
"I really thought love
would save us all."
She stared at the patchwork ceiling with her violet eyes,
Gave the television a goodnight wink and slept.

i am an american troubadour.
The leather-bound book has pencil on the pages,
Handwritten notes and two love letters tucked in the back.
The violet-eyed girl with layered hair—Blonde on Blonde—
Would listen to me playing that Martin in the dark.

She never understood why I kept the battered book
Or the six-string that had long lost its varnish
Until I sang a song for her in an unlit parking lot, said"
"This night, with the moon in crescent,
the lilacs in bloom matching your eyes,
and the clock at 11:11, this might have been
what my father was talking about
when he finally set down that guitar."
and led her by the hand to the car with broken speakers
so we could drive south along Highway 61.

Play on

Justin Barker

A boy plucks tunes on a guitar—his fast
fingers pick with gritty nails and quick
one, two tap of boot against the cement,
a chewed gum mosaic of pink and blue.
He shuts his eyes and lets his fingers guide.
I toss change into a velvet lined case
and watch him as he keeps his hands on task.
,I know he doesn't just play for the handouts.
And I long to know where he sleeps at night;
whether he thinks of mother's homemade meals,
and if he would trade his dirt-stiffened shorts
for a set of his freshly laundered clothes.
My time drifts away with the chords that ring
through trees and park benches, across playgrounds,
around the stone statues, and over ponds.
He plays as the shadows snuff out the last
light and usher the few stragglers away.
I grab my bag and retreat from the park
where drug deals will soon take the place of picnics,
while the boy still taps a beat with gritty fingers.

Mandy's Floor

Joel Ferdon

I sit on the floor of Mandy's room. I
Pick up random paper-clips that are
hungrily looking for coffee stained manuscripts.
The circular remnants of hole punched
paper congregate like ants searching for
food. The old bruised books, on the floor
like me, show their emotion through
comatose pages. Brown, dusty, dirty floor
says love making splendors life. Fungus
like humanistic poetry bleeds through
pages of insanity.

New College Thesaurus

Justin Lafreniere

Amaze, v. astonish; overwhelm; surprise;
adventuring to off campus parties, inhaling the vodka-laden air
enough to intoxicate me; the floor is slick
and sticky with beer and all that is lost on a couple
of brand-new friends discussing Shakespeare
on the warped picnic table in the backyard;
the lonely-free feeling of tentative babysteps
amidst pupil-green grass of the residential quad
to register for four more years of school;
to fit twelve friends, brothers, sisters at a table only seating
five in a dining hall clamoring with anonymous classmates
and the din of gossip thick as the lukewarm gravy.

Bedtime, n. undefined; a time for rest;
four a.m when camping across the state line
in at a KOA blanketed by darkness near a squalid
haunted house with plastic skulls in the front yard;
three a.m lunch at the twenty-four hour diner
where you feel safe because there's always an overweight
cop with a gluttonous eye on the shady patrons;
tossing a baseball through the floodlights shining in a torrent
on the clocktower, waiting for sunrise and wondering why
you've never been out to obelisk at daybreak before tonight;
twenty minutes after smoking your first cigarette on a wooden bench;
walking barefoot on the cool stone of a parking deck
with a blue eyed girl to watch Faulkner's stars
running backwards and never falling until her lips
run fleetingly across yours, like the echo of sunset
bouncing against the night's early blackness.
when the liquor is done or we pass out on the blue carpet
to dream of the real world and a lover and a sky hanging
over somewhere we've never been and might never see;
when the first girl you've ever fallen in love with
coaxes you under the cover with adoring sepia sunset eyes
and a smile barely illumined the transient glow of the lamp.
SEE: Insomnia.

Intoxicated, adj. drunkenness; inebriety; insobriety; alcoholism
being wasted; being fucked up; dipsomania; bacchanals;
toasted; intemperance; obliterated
all-night conversations with Jack Daniels;
evenings lost to oblivion and mixed drinks;
hiding in the laundry room, listening to the dryers rumble
and campus police march by on another early morning patrol;
hookups with beautiful people you've always wanted
or tongue-tying contests with people you barely know;
nights you would not trade for all the time in Paradise;
parties; kegstands; things we may regret come sunrise;
Saturday nights, Sunday mornings or at least three days a week;
staggering and weaving up the stairs to your room
with your best friend trying to carry you;
Southern cherrypopper shots that lead to foggy windows
and rumors about you and her in the backseat of a car.

Study, v. meditiation; research; examination; atelier; etude;
brushing sundripped hair behind delicate ears
to whisper secrets about your friends;
making out with the girl from the back of English 120.
playing hide-and-seek until getting asked to leave
or being thrown out of the library;
practicing for the band you aren't in;
sleeping; telling jokes and gossiping;
swashbuckling with mechanical pencils;
watching the snow fall on the sidewalk below and praying
for canceled classes.
working on a term paper in vain disbelief that in two months
and six days, you will walk slowly across another stage,
take another diploma, and life will finally begin.

Happy Bamboo

Molly Rose Nass

How long does a happy bamboo plant choose
to live quietly in the faint sunlight
not at all hidden from my roommate's sight
watching over all the things that we lose?
Trying so hard to be the perfect muse
but waiting for the dark part of the night
to secretly stretch to its fullest height
while lapping up mud that I have let ooze.

It bows to the colorful window box
and romances precocious sunflowers
from its place on the windowsill.
Do flowers spend their time watching the clocks,
and practicing how to properly glower,
at prettier specimens that make the heart stand still?

Scoffing at rust

Eli Narwhal

It comes from the rattle of a paper gong
or the saddle of a Mongol archer,
from the garbage dumps of Jersey
to the slums of New York City,
Nightingales sing to the coppery moon.
Stamps are put on soldier's letters home,
as condoms are put on their shriveled penises in Baghdad brothels.
Cocoons grow on the patio tables of suburbanites.
Coyotes disappear into the artificial haze of West Nevada.
Optometrists dream of long lost wives as they stare into their patient's eyes.
Cats lick the palms of dying nursing home residents.
On the beaches, bottles wash up, and dead dogs with bloated stomachs.
A lonesome poet huddles in a London apartment, dreaming of success.
Molecules collide in the Petri dishes at the local high school.
Bodies slither and slide their lengths behind the velvet curtains of a burlesque hall.
Door to door salesmen frown at shutting doors.
Vonnegut and Twain laugh through tears in their graves watching their country decay.
Our flag stands on the face of Mr. Moon in
a silence we could never believe; a silence we only scoff at.
And all the while the nightingales sing to a coppery moon,
and all the geniuses think alone in their rooms and wonder, why?

Maybe the Mobs is Still on the Island

Justin Lafreniere

I rang the doorbell, listening to hollow noise echo around the inside of the house, arousing the barking of a small dog yipping at the intruder who was announcing himself. Looking up while I waited, I took in the large façade of the south Islip home, the white walls. Her mom met me at the door, smile on her face and heavy blush offsetting her green eyes. Stepping back from the entryway, beckoning me inside. My dirty adidas kicked across the tile floor and I looked around the foyer, to family pictures and artwork on the walls, offsetting the white in a collage of homeliness.

Her mom seemed to find my relative shock at the size of the house amusing. She patted me on the hip and wlaked towards the large spiral staircase that offset the center of the room. "Let me call her. She's changed her outfit about thirteen times, you know how girls are on first dates." I did? I mean, I'd put on the same outfit about six times, unable to decided as I rotated from blue jeans to black jeans to shorts and all the way back to the first choice. I know how people are on first dates.

"Son, let me tell you, I know my daughter and...you told her even o'clock?" her father checked his watch. I nodded. "She won't be ready until seven fifteen, which means you've got twenty five minutes of waiting to do. Why don't we take a walk out front? I'll show you around." His arm around my shoulder pushed me back towards the front door; we left with the sound of the dog still yipping. Don concrete stairs, he walked with determined strides to his black Volkswagen. Hitting the keyless lock, he opened the passenger's door. "Get in."

Normally, I'm not a fan for getting into strange cars with fathers of daughters I'm looking to enter a romantic relationship with. Bad business policy. But something about this tone, calm look and slightly threatening demeanor brought me into the seat and hooking up the lap belt. He came around the other side, sat and adjusted himself until her was comfortable, then started the ignition and drove. The silence would have made a car full of mines proud as we turned through side streets towards the island's coast.

He took me down to the Bayberry Yacht Club—the BBYC as the locals call it I could see her favorite pier, the one with a dole in the wooden planks so the water sometimes licked up to the wet splintered edges. Her favorite sailboat tose in a vision of faux-grandeur, like some beached white whales that was beached for repairs. I could smell the sea salt as it came through the windows and lingering in the car, sticking to my nostrils like an echo.

"You know where we are son?" I wished he's stop calling me son. I'm going to be dating his daughter soon and it was making me feel awkward. A pale index finger pushed up his black rimmed glasses.

"Yes sir, the BBYC. I've been here a time or two, but I've got to say, I'm not much of a sailor." I looked back out the window and stared out to the horizon, daydreaming about nothing until the old man got out of the car. I followed him out, walking in his shadow as his shined dress shoes clicked over the wood. We were heading towards the hole in the docks.

"Since you aren't much of a sailor, I'm not going to expect you to know how currents work. But seeing as how you're preparing to take me little girl out on a date, I'm going to ask you a question: do you know how long it would take something organic, roughly the size of your body to float back up here if it were weighted down and dropped through this hole?"

"No, sir."

He began to walk back towards the car. "Long enough."

BBYC Dock Jump

Amanda LaRocco

It was always a late summer afternoon when the sun was about to set that you knew it was almost time to go. The paint brushed pinks, oranges and yellows colored the sky by the Fire Island Bridge, making the clouds seem closer. Into the canal our white sails puffed in the wind. We would push our tiler extensions too and fro till we reached our destination.

Something about the Bayberry dock, whether it be the worn out wood that could cave in at any moment or the sloppy tied bow lines, made it a prime running deck for young sailors to catapult into the air before being engulfed by the subtle tides of the bay. It was a after regatta ritual of course. They didn't call us the little rascals of the Great South Bay for nothing.

The long floating dock was the best runway option. You had the most amble amount of time to get a head start before lunging into the kaleidoscope water. Obstacles to avoid consisted of Mercury cleats and left behind flip flops.

Then there was the unconventional buoy tied to the boat lift that we all dangerously held on to for dear life as we took our running start with hope and a hold of breath only to dangle above the boat ramp trusting the kinetic energy would swing us into the water. My brother discovered and perfected the method.

My favorite was the short floating dock. It extended farthest out into the canal and had no ties to any sailboats, free of any obligation. It left room for creativity. We would tie wake-boards to the dock and have balance fights, or play greasy watermelon. If we were clever enough that day we would push an instructor of the dock, or at the very least we would try to sink the side they stood their ground because it was so old and the Styrofoam underneath was uneven.

The Bayberry dock has seen more sunsets, storms and barefoot sailors then I can even fathom. Weathered boards which carried the weight of those who were about to dive into something much greater then themselves.

Something about laying down on that dock, letting the sun imagine my thoughts as I close my eyes. Breathing in the memories makes me wish I was sixteen again; curious, innocent and invincible.

Counting Leaves

Leslie Pitman

It was autumn again, and the season was no more alive than Mama's wilted hyacinths in the window box. Munich was beaten down like a fighter in the pen: entire neighborhoods deserted, trash and soldiers lining the streets, "No Jews allowed" and broken windows glaring at the shoppers on the corner. Papa and his cigar friends thought we were giving up. But I believed we would stand up again. I knew we would. It's like I told Adalia, my baby sister: "I'll do what they tell me to, and then, when they aren't looking, I'll use everything they ever taught me against them. They won't get to me like they've gotten to everyone else." She just looked at me and smiled, her new set of teeth barely showing. She was much too young to understand.

There we were, Adalia and I, on the couch—me on my knees and her on her tip toes with my hand resting on her back. Our faces were pressed against the glazed window, and we were counting the leaves as they fell off the trees. My tree, the one on the left, was winning; we were up by fifteen. But then again, Adalia could hardly count past ten, so I had an unfair advantage. I briefly allowed my eyes to shift to my brother and his girlfriend, and caught myself widening my stare as he kissed her firmly on the lips.

"Warwick, not in front of the children!" Mama scolded, although it was only me who saw—and I certainly was not a child. I was 16, nearly a man. I had a razor I sharpened each morning sitting next to the kitchen sink. I had a belt, my very own leather belt, that I had stolen from the tailor's one day after school. And I had kissed three girls, one in front of Mama. But she forgot that often, that I had grown up, even though my actions should have served as a constant reminder. I glanced quickly back to Ada, to focus on the game. She had not turned her head away from the window for a moment. She kept on counting, always starting over after nine or ten, even through the commotion of the knock at the door. "Who would come to the door at supper time?"

Mama grumbled. She was always grumbling. Don't answer it, Nixie," Papa shouted from his chair by the fireplace. "It might be one of our damn friends and God knows she'll talk us right through breakfast tomorrow."

"Answer it, Ivo," Mama said to me through her teeth. Ada announced herself the winner without looking away from the trees as I took the mere four steps to the door. The wooden plank—the one that always creaks when the door opens—screamed more loudly than usual. "Dammit, Nixie," a voice sounded from afar.

A crumbled leaf flew against my face when I opened the door. The streets of Munich were abandoned, save for an old man walking his dog and a small boy running back to his home a few rows down. Sometimes the Gestapo were on the streets, but not tonight. For a brief moment, it seemed as if I had been right—that it was all over. But when she spoke, and I was forced to recognize her torn clothing and lack of warmth, I was blatantly reminded of reality.

She greeted me in German, but I could not understand her broken words. I was shivering, and so was she, and still we stood there, unmoved, as she carried on with a shaking explanation.

"Ivo," Mama started as she walked toward the door, "don't just make her stand out in the cold. She's freezing." She quickly ushered the strange girl inside by the shoulder, nearly knocking me over in the process, as I was unable to remove myself from the doorway. My eyes had not left her. And we still didn't know her name.

"Shayna." But it was Mama who spoke, not the girl. She was still quivering, mildly. "This is my son, Ivo. Are you alone?"

The girl nodded. By now, of course, we were all gathered around the poor ragged thing as if she were the first human any of us had ever seen. But I knew then, as I know now, that it wasn't that she was a human. No. We were gathered around staring because she was the first Jew any of us had seen in our home in a year. And it took me too many minutes to realize I had not blinked since answering the door. Her trembling commanded my attention like the falling leaves outside, and left me just as frozen as those trees would soon become when winter set in.

"Well, you're just in time for dinner, dear," Mama declared. I blinked. "Go wash up and come to eat and we'll get your bed ready later." No one asked questions. No one said anything. No one except tiny little Ada, who shook Mama's apron and said "I winned Ivo."

We had dinner that night, and many nights after. She slept in the basement behind Papa's stacks of papers and mounds of Mama's fabric. All one hundred thousand of the leaves fell off the trees —Ada and I kept counting—until the trees were naked and frozen. Shayna made fun of our game, although she joined in once or twice.

"I imagine each fallen leaf to be another child taken away from his family, another shopkeeper left with a ransacked store, another mother beaten by the Gestapo," she remarked quietly one day after Ada had skipped away from the couch. "There they are. Trampled, discolored, and detached from their source of life. Innumerable." I stared at her, my eyebrows furrowed and my tongue pushed against my molars, ready to speak. "What do you imagine them to be, Ivo?"

"Not dead people. Why would I count the leaves if they were dead people? It's just a game. Nothing more," I answered, more than annoyed that she had perverted the innocence of the game my little sister and I had invented. "And the leaves are nothing but signs of the winter," I added. "I like the winter. We can go sledding in the snow! I'll take you sledding."
"Where will I sled, Ivo? In the basement? You can't hide a Jew very well if you take her sledding."
"Oh, that. This will all be over by the time the snow starts falling. You'll see."

"I can see. You can't," she sighed, then told me I should run along—like I were a child who needed to be told what to do.
But the trees grew bare, and every morning was covered with a white mantle and every evening sloshed with a gray ocean. It was then, when the snow started each day and melted each night, that Shayna fell ill, and it was decided that she would sleep in the study room by the fireplace under Papa's favorite blanket until her health improved. My bedroom was directly beside the study, so I woke up nearly every night, when she was having an hour-long coughing fit. It was all I could do to bring her a glass of water and a companion. And we would talk.

At first, we told stories. And then stories turned to secrets. And sometimes the stories would be the secrets. One night, I returned from Hitler Youth well past supper time, and Shayna's cough had already started. I found her by the dying fire, her thick chestnut hair swirled around her pointed head, like a picture frame. A single strand lay across her nose and curled at the end, forming a perfect shape under her lips. Her toes were moving incessantly, gripping each other over and over in an attempt to stay warm. She was coughing violently, yet her face radiated a kind of spiritual serenity that made her seem untouchable. I stood there, in the doorway, unmoving. She had hypnotized me again, my eyes watering from their own refusal to close. "Ivo," she spoke suddenly, startling me into a blinking frenzy. "bring me that water, please, and then go to bed." "Oh, here," I said, handing her the glass as she sat up on her forearms. "And I am not tired. Not at all."

"You are tired. But you are also stubborn. So, fine. Tell me why you were so late getting home tonight." Her eyebrows raised cautiously, and her pitch black eyes stared at me as if they already knew the answer.
"You know how it goes," I started as I took a seat on the floor beside her, but she shook her head and told me that no, she had no idea how it went.
"Oh. Right. Well, we have a new officer, and he was testing everyone to prove his authority. And two of the boys, thirteen-year-olds, were not cooperating. So we had to stay and watch them run ten miles and do one hundred push-ups. Stupid boys. They should have just listened."
"Why do you listen to them, Ivo, if you know that what they—the Nazis—are doing is wrong?"

"Shayna, I have no choice. If I weren't going to Hitler Youth, then they would suspect us of disloyalty, and then where would you hide? So consider it my gift to you."

"You are learning how to be a Nazi for me. Don't you understand how twisted that is? That in order to protect me, seemingly, you have to participate in the very movement that is forcing me to seek protection." She was pushing me, and I didn't know how to respond.

"You know I have to do it," was all I could say. And after an uncomfortable silence, I told her what I had told tiny little Ada months before. That I was learning from them only to use their tricks against them. That I would stop it. That all I needed was time. "I won't let them get to me," I ended. Then her tender hand met my cheek bone with a force I could not have expected that knocked me backwards, my head barely missing the edge of the wooden rocking chair.

"They have already gotten to you!" Her voice, though barely more than a whisper, was filled with passion and anger, like the declaration of a sergeant to his incompetent soldiers. Her eyes, hard and deep, were filling with tears. Her hair was disheveled and her bottom lip was beginning to tremble. I was staring again.

Like a defeated little boy, I stood up from the floor and carried myself, shoulders slumped over, to my own bed. "They will never get to me," I thought aloud, my head still spinning from her exclamation and the gaze of her onyx eyes. There was so much hope there, yet so much despair. I would not let myself despair, and I would not believe that the world was a bad place. Believing that only allowed for weakness, and I was a man; I was supposed to be strong.

When the winter warmed and Shayna's strength returned, Mama decided Shayna should start sleeping in the basement again. I feared that her improved health and underground room meant our nightly exposures

would cease. But her first night back behind Mama's piles of fabric, I awoke to the sound of nothing, and carried a glass of water down the stairs.

At the bottom of the steps, I rounded the corner and found my way to the back of the room where I heard the faint vestige of what was left of her cough. Her thin toes were intertwining with each other and the night was so silent, I could hear her gentle breathing. Through the darkness, I saw her smile, the same strand of hair curled flawlessly around her lip. "I was hoping you would come," she murmured.

"I couldn't sleep," I replied. I set down the glass and felt my way in the shadows to her side. Her icy hand accidentally brushed my arm, making me suddenly aware of the bitter, cold air accompanying us. I gently pulled her toward me, our bodies becoming so close that our heartbeats synchronize themselves. We were fighting for warmth, but we were not struggling.

"Do you remember when you helped Mama with her Christmas sewing?" I asked her, eager to reminisce. "She never would have gotten it done if you hadn't been here. But imagine their faces if they knew a Jew had sewn their holiday gown." I watched her eyes close.

"Imagine," she replied somberly, revealing her bright, hurting irises. "Ivo." It was her story-telling voice. I looked softly at her face, her eyes the only light in the dismal cellar, and waited for the tale. But there was no story. Just a secret. "I have to leave soon."

And then, because I feared that which I claimed to not be powered by, because I was afraid of all that they promised to destroy, because the reality of Shayna—a faultless girl, separated from her family, a 17-year-old fearing death in every moment, forced to grow up before she had the chance to be a child—made the reality of the world something tangible and far-too-easy to grasp, I kissed her. Because the world could not take her away from me, because Hitler's power was only as good as the people's persuasion, because this woman was too perfect for such a broken place, and because I wanted, more than anything, to protect her.

Her thin, dry lips responded to my control, pressing all of their passion into the deepest part of my soul. "You can't protect me," she whispered. "I have to keep running."

"I know. But let's pretend like I can protect you. That I can hold you here, like this, forever." Ivo, we can't pretend. You have to grow up. You can't count the leaves with baby Ada forever. The leaves will keep on falling whether you watch them or not. You have to see the leaves for what they are. You have to do something real, Ivo. You have to be real."

"This," I announce with discovery, "is real. You are real." She smiles as her tender fingers gently, assuredly, touch my face, then my neck, then my back. And as my hands, and then my body, and then my deepest part of heart surrender to her veracity, I become fully aware of my truth. I am no longer a child, as my mother will still call me. I am a shattered and vulnerable human being, and one of many. One of thousands. Millions. I am just another leaf falling from the tree. No one is counting me, but I am here, and I am real, and I am alive.

15 One Sentence Stories

Justin Lafreniere

1. Playing hair-metal cover bands in the new millennium is a creative way of saying unemployed.
2. First impact was the frontside of a Celica; the second was a white ribbon and a tombstone at the base of my trunk.
3. After fifty years, the last rose of the bouquet withers in a plastic case and the metal bands are in the sunset red glow a burning house.
4. Never mix Murphy's Law and autoerotic asphyxiation.
5. He dressed like the Mad Hatter and talked like the White Rabbit, but his girlfriend had the grin without the cat and ended up telling him "I'm late."
6. Epitaph found in a West Pennsylvania cemetery: Faith-healing is believing in Death.
7. He failed his interview as a pilot for the Goodyear Blimp by walking into the hangar with a Led Zeppelin t-shirt on.
8. His mother was a crack-addict, he had palsy, AIDS, a life doomed to death and all the times my parents told me he never said a word; my memory isn't flawed: he always spoke to me.
9. Marcus and Jimmy snuck through the hole in the fence, crawled army-style, inch by inch up to the spirit rock; they took the spray paint from their satchel bag and left the names of everyone they'd ever loved and drove off into the darkness forever.
10. Pistol-whipping your friends in laser tag is very inappropriate.
11. She laid out under the Montana sky as blue as her eyes and stared upwards because nothing ever comes, nothing ever goes, nothing ever changes and eventually we die and those white clouds blowing across the only sea she's ever seen stay stuck in her memory until she pulls herself to her feet, clicks her heels against the asphalt and walks slowly, purposely, towards forever.
12. Samantha never startled me more than when she offered to watch porn with me, just as friends.
13. Where there had been a stone, there was no more, there was only a black crater and blood and bones and the smell of burning flesh and sulfur in the air.
14. It's a looking glass that swallows me whole and takes my sadness, stretches it out like bubblegum or tar and pulls on it and pulls on it; the black, smooth rock of the Vietnam Memorial could make a statue cry, soft little drops and snuffles that can be covered with a pale hand.
15. Love is the best form of self-mutilation.

An Unwelcome Kiss at Six in the Morning

Melissa Wilds

She was snow on the asphalt. She was winter; she was spring. She was the moment when winter turns to spring, and I saw constellations in her eyes when she spoke of him.

She was the heavy metal that I always hated, yet I still couldn't help picturing her jamming to it in a pair of Hello Kitty pajamas. She was blue hair and green fishnets one day, peasant skirt and pixie-toed boots the next. She was 'hold the ice, if you please' and 'make it much stronger next time.'

She was the goddess that I worshipped daily, and I made my sacrifices in hugs (instead of kisses) and comfort (instead of passion) and all the tears that I shed for her. (And I did it gladly)

She was coffee at three a.m. and painting our toenails in every color of the rainbow. She was me forgetting my lines because I kept staring at her profile as she recited Hamlet like she was born on the stage.

She was never enough, and too much at once, and oh, God, if I didn't get my daily fix of her lip-ringed smile I'd die of withdrawals because life had no meaning if she wasn't walked beside me talking about birdsong in the dead of winter.

She could always see the stars, even if it was cloudy outside and my heart would break for her as I watched her staring at them on her roof, longing for someone she could never have, because I loved her, too, and she would never be mine.

She was starlight, shining gently on me as if from a million miles away, and if only I could hold her in my arms I would die a happy woman.

She could shatter my heart in three words and mend it in two. She could smile at me from across the room in the middle of History and I would hear the Hallelujah chorus singing in my head as I missed the professor's question because she had smiled at me.

It's how I knew she wouldn't like those CDs I gave her because they were too 'mainstream' but she would listen to them anyway because, so help me, I did like pretty boys singing about suicide, and to her, that was all that mattered.

It's how I always held her above me (she was wittier classier cooler stronger better) but I never felt small when I was with her.

It's how she kept me safe when I needed it, and how I thank life itself for bringing me into her arms one hot August day.

It's how I knew she was flawed, imperfect, -human, just like the rest of us mortals that followed in her wake- but I continued to think of her as the defining example of what it meant to be alive.

It's how I could have kissed her when we lay next to each other in the dewy grass, but I didn't because I knew it would hurt her more.

It's simple, really. I made a promise to myself: that I would stay by her side forever, and would never ask more of her than she had to give. That I would never force my feelings on her, because she was leading me through back alleys in the middle of January wearing a miniskirt and I had never felt so happy.
(If I could have died right then, I swear to you that my swan song would have turned the earth to a paradise where she could in live, in perfect bliss, forever.)
But fairy tales never come true, because when we left that club at six in the morning, drunk silly and grinning like fools, I forgot everything she had meant to me and I broke that promise.

And now she never smiles at me from across the room; she never comes to school in a purple cloak; because she won't even speak to me anymore, and I'll never forgive myself for breaking her heart.

Thus Do We Reach the Stars

Justin Lafreniere

Richmond is coming up . in seventy minutes, I'll think about how the taillights of the cars ahead of us look like retreating eyes of alien invader, floating off into the darkness. I'm a piece of jetsam on the asphalt river of I-95, heading towards the River City. My father's Chevy rocks me to sleep with a vibrating lull, running through the passenger seat and up my back. He has peppered hair rumpled like a suit left at the bottom of the closet and drives with eyes staring vaguely ahead.

In the sky, one of white clouds looks like Pegasus charging the sun.

The Marlboro plant looms out the window. The monolith reaches up over the landscape passing the sixty-eight miles per hour. It's reminder of what built the south,

Raised this city towards the stars and slavery and secession. Two of those fell and failed. But the plant remains, apillar holding this city afloat on the James River.

A summer ago, I passed that tower at dusk. I drove and my companion watched the factory. Watched it up over the horizon. Against tonight's dirty tan sunset, the red stripe running across the tower's top looks like a tear of blood mixing with western dust. She told me, tapping a carton against her palm, she' s always wanted to smoke a Marlboro as she passed the factory. Smoking isn't allowed in my father's car. I turn my head slightly to see her aface. Her eyes stare at the spire and her lips might almost be smiling. I roll down the window and tell her she can.

Passing the tower she lights up a Cowboy Killer.

Four cylinders moved me both times, pistons pushing me in a galloping rhythm. On the second ride, I am asleep in the front seat. A battered hat pulled over my eyes tried vainly to black out the southern sun red as the cigarette brand.

I'm dreaming about her lighting up. Blowing the smoke out of her rounded lips, a perfect ring comes out. The cloud curls out, never ends. Its billowing trail floods the car. It passes out the open window in lasso I swear I could pull down the whole world. She breathes gently to let it all go. But it comes back, seeps into her throat where it squeezes at the pink of her lungs or maybe at that nicotine-slowed heart.

She breaths it all in. exhales. The smoke surrounds, intoxicates me. Blackness overtakes me before it recedes into the dusky light. I can see her sitting astride a horse the color of my hair. She clicks her lips like a kiss and the mustang stirs beneath her. He has green eyes, sad eyes like mine. His whinny sounds like a heartbroken song, a song you could only hear on a southern night, made up of fatalism and fireflies and soft piano and defeat. She yanks on the reins and gallops towards sunset and her skin is the color of dried sagebrush.

My father taps the brakes. I pitch forward against the dash.

A year ago, her dress, her eyes were suicide black when she smokes Reds in the Capital of the South.

Falling back asleep, she greets me with a six-shooter. Her voice could tame unicorns, I know, as she whispers, Sic Itur Ad Astra. My blood mixes into the southern dirt. Smokes rises from the gun. She lights up a Cowboy Killer and walks towards the sunset on the edge of the world.

conversation takes place between a cashier, his supervisor, and the store manager

Johnathan Pennington

Cashier: So, if I started working here about three years ago, where do you think I would be in the store?

Supervisor: I'm not sure.

Manager: I don't know. Why do you ask?

Cashier: Well, looking at all the managers, they don't have degrees. They just have experience.
Supervisor shifts uncomfortably.

Cashier (continues): I just wonder, you know? Why did I go to college? I spent three years in school for what? I could have spent three years working at this store, moving up. I'd make more money than I do now. I'd probably have better references. What's my degree doing for me? I mean, I don't have enough of the skills that businesses want. Why go to school? You both make more than me, with less education. It just feels like such a waste.

Manager: *You* might not have moved up.

My Cell Phone: The Reason I Will Never Mar

Carissa Orlando

Most of the girls I know would sell a kidney to be married. If they were fortunate enough to have grooms picked out, they would already be at the other side of that aisle, waiting with dripping mascara and a toothy grin, severed kidney chilling in a bucket of ice nearby. These girls simply cannot comprehend why whenever people inquire as to my potentially impending engagement, I begin to perspire heavily. Actually, this trait of mine puzzles quite a lot of people, especially my boyfriend. He is a patient man, but a small fistful of instances in our three-year relationship had him turning worried eyes upon me and asking, "What about marriage makes you so anxious?"

Truly, it's hard to put it into words. I usually resort to stuttering out a few meaningless clichés before I end my brilliant argument with a shrug. Perhaps I should just tell him about my cell phone.

I didn't want to get a new phone. In fact, as a young, daydreaming innocent, I wouldn't imagine why I would ever desire a new phone. The first cell phone I ever knew—my childhood sweetheart, if you will—I would have gladly used him until he fell apart. He was a bar phone, gray and plain. The color screen was his only marketable feature, but I loved him anyway. He wasn't flashy or popular, but he was always faithful, like the dull acquaintance you call upon on a Friday night when everyone else already has plans—he's not your first choice for entertainment, but he's available. However, my friends didn't value these qualities as heavily as I and convinced me to ditch my Old Reliable for a shiny new clamshell—a camera phone. With a few reservations, I conceded and broke off my long-standing relationship with Old Reliable for a hotter piece of technology.

At first, Hot Piece and I were perfectly compatible. We went everywhere together. Of course, he had several flaws, the most notable of which was an apparent technological miscommunication between himself and every other phone on the planet that prevented me from ever successfully sending any of Hot Piece's pictures to anyone I knew. He often caused fights between my friends and I, as we argued over whether I had really sent them the picture or not. Perhaps I was young and naïve, but I allowed this glaring flaw to continue throughout our relationship. Besides, I liked his ring tone, and I found that, for the most part, he treated me well. We lived together for two years.

In the summer of our second year together,

Hot Piece stopped speaking to me. I wasn't certain if this new behavior was due to something I did (or rather—some sharp object from my purse that jammed into his speaker), but whenever I received a phone call or message, Hot Piece would only mumble absently, a nearly inaudible sound. My friends knew of our turbulent relationship and provided words of comfort and support, urging me to drop the son-of-a-bitch and get with a better phone. At first, I refused to listen; Hot Piece and I had been together too long for me to leave him how. I tried my hardest to work through this problem with him; many a nights I spent desperately pressing at his buttons, only to be met with cold silence. Finally, after many a missed phone call (one, notably, from a friend who had been waiting for me to pick him up at the airport for an hour and a half before I even realized he had called to say he caught an earlier flight), I realized Hot Piece and I were experiencing irreconcilable differences. Truly, we held different beliefs: He believed that I would love him regardless of his behaviors (or lack thereof), and I believed that communication—or more specifically, the ability to make any noise whatsoever—is a vital part of any cell phone contract. Our relationship ended.

Luckily, the world looks kindly on sad girls who have been mistreated by their deadbeat cell phones. I tended to my broken heart, got myself dressed, and located an AT&T store. A salesman was standing boldly by the front door, almost as if he had been waiting for me. He expressed his sympathy for the way Hot Piece had been treating me. We discussed our shared belief that cell phones ought to make noise, and he introduced me to a few potential replacements for the disappointing Hot Piece. My potential suitors stood in a line, each gleaming and showing off their more desirable features. Hesitantly, I got to know a few. Some of them were overly glamorous and obviously loaded, blatantly out of my league. They reminded me of how I used to feel when I was younger and would ask for Jon Bon Jovi for Christmas, aware that, while his design features were certainly aesthetically pleasing, I wouldn't know how to operate most of the gadgets he came with.

I spied a small, plain clamshell in a blue outfit. He was the standard AT&T camera phone, easy to use with few special talents. After the heart-wrenching end of my relationship with Hot Piece, I needed a transition phone, a companion to move me smoothly from one phone to the next with minimal emotional attachment while I healed my wounds—this was the technological equivalent of eating neutral Saltine crackers after being violently ill for some time. I decided that, while I felt no rush of dizzying intoxication over his physical appearance, we would get along quite well. Compatibility, after all, is a vital part of any relationship. I was about to announce the good news to the salesman when I saw Dark Handsome.

Dark Handsome was much better looking than my previous suitor. He was much better looking than the flashy Hot Piece. In fact, he was the nicest looking phone I had ever seen. His body

was slim and slick, a shining, beautiful black. His face was flawless. He was quite long when opened, and his screen was vibrantly colored. Even better, he was the same price as the other boring suitor with whom I had previously been toying. A moment alone with him had me grinning excitedly, feeling a little like I did when I first met Hot Piece. I have never been prone to whims based purely on physical attractiveness, but Dark Handsome's charming nature made me willing to test the odds. I decided to take him home with me.

The first setback in our relationship came before we even left the AT&T store. I quickly learned the pricing information promised to me by Dark Handsome was only true after the rebate, without tax. Before the rebate, Dark Handsome cost more money than I had spent on any phone previously, and, frankly, more money than I believed one person should pay for a phone—ever. Frivolous spending has never been in my nature, and, upset at Dark Handsome's deception, I wondered if I was making the right choice. However, one glance at Dark Handsome's gorgeous face made me once again certain of my decision.

The AT&T salesman prepared for Dark Handsome's departure and discussed with me the specifics of our impending relationship. "You'll be entering into a two year contract," he told me, handing me the necessary papers to sign.

Suddenly, my confidence in the decision was gone. Two years? With this phone? Sure, Dark Handsome was a dashing phone, both attractive and charming, but I had just met him. Certainly, I had not garnered enough information about him from our short courtship to determine, beyond a doubt, if I could spend every day with him for two grueling years. Signing this contract meant I would be stuck for Dark Handsome for 730 long days—730 mornings of waking up to Dark Handsome and 730 nights of going to sleep with Dark Handsome. Dark Handsome would be along for every car trip, every day at work, every night out with my friends, and every meal I ate for 17,520 long hours. While it was true that I enjoyed his company in the present, I was admittedly in the throes of infatuation. Infatuation, by nature, fades.

What if, I wondered, Dark Handsome proves to be a horrible partner? What if Dark Handsome gets awful reception or is cumbersome to speak to? What if he breaks, requiring me to spend the rest of his life tending to his wounds or illnesses, too cheap to pay for his replacement? Worse, what if I found, early in our relationship, that I didn't care for him after all? I would be left with over a year of torture, bound to a relationship with a phone I did not love.

Ironically, signing the contract was an intelligent decision and I had no other logical choice. Without the luxury of a contract, the price of Dark Handsome would have more than doubled, and AT&T's pay-as-you-go plans are by no means financially smart. If I had balls, AT&T would have had me by them. I set my reservations aside and scratched my signature across the bottom of the

contract, binding the next two years of my life away to a strange phone I had just met.

Reservations or not, Dark Handsome and I were officially a couple. As Dark Handsome and I left the store, my reservations began to wane. Dark Handsome was truly a lovely specimen of cell phone construction, and each glance upon his perfect face filled me with familiar feelings of infatuation. I rushed to a friend's house, excited to show off my hot new catch to my girlfriends. My friends purred over Dark Handsome, each eager to run their hands over him and fiddle with his gadgets. They cast jealous glances at his sleek body and bemoaned their own old, ugly phones. I went to sleep that night with Dark Handsome by my side, my confidence in our budding relationship fully restored.

As the months passed, Dark Handsome and I fell into a comfortable relationship. While the original elation I felt over our companionship faded with the passing of time, my fear over our commitment subdued as well. Dark Handsome was a wonderful companion, the best a girl could ask for. His battery, well, it was long-lasting. I could use him for hours at a time, and he had the same amount of energy when I was done. We were good partners, Dark Handsome and I, and I was confident in our respective abilities to spend the next two years of our lives together.

Then, an accident happened. It was my fault, really. I was running through a parking lot, late to a meeting, and Dark Handsome fell. Obscenities spewed from my mouth as I watched his unblemished body meet the rough, unforgiving concrete. I rushed to his side, fearing the worst. Fortunately, I found that his wounds were not fatal, and he was still able to function perfectly. However, his face, his beautiful face, received the brunt of the damage and suffered several scratches. I told Dark Handsome that I was glad he was alright, but kept the truth to myself—his face was his most attractive feature and one of the primary reasons I took him home with me in the first place. I feared that this damage might be devastating to our relationship.

Some time later, I became aware I was openly lusting after other phones. The phones of my friends caused me to lift an inquisitive eyebrow, and I often found myself longing to touch these phones, to lift their lids and examine their inner secrets. The Blackberries were my biggest weakness, and it seemed that they were everywhere. As my part time job, I took pictures and wrote item descriptions for a company that sells items, mainly cell phones, on eBay, and I would work with a different Blackberry every week. Blackberries of all shapes and sizes, all different models, mostly at the peak of their physical condition, would pass through my hands at a near constant basis. As I posed and re-posed each in our photo booth, watching the light gleam off of their exposed, shining keys as I took picture after picture of their hard bodies, only one thought ran, marquee-style, through my mind: These Blackberries could be mine.I tried my best to hold

steadfast to my commitment with Dark Handsome, to banish these unfaithful thoughts from my consciousness. After all, our contract didn't expire for a year and a half; desiring a new cell phone would not make that time move any faster. However, it was difficult to ignore the Blackberries as they paraded through the store. I couldn't help but ogle at their features, fantasizing about slipping my SIM card into their rears and making them my new best friends.

It was around this time that Dark Handsome started to lose his stamina. A feature of his that I simply adored was his endurance, his ability to maintain battery power for periods of time I had previously thought impossible to labor through. Suddenly, it seemed that he was losing control of his battery and often lost power prematurely. He would have a long, full battery indicator one minute and a small, pathetic battery charge the next. While I wondered as to the cause of his malady (perhaps it was something I did?), I was unsympathetic to his plight. In fact, I was angry with him. At a time when the studly Blackberries were tempting me with their glamour on a near-daily basis, the last thing I needed in my life was an impotent cell phone. The urge to break my contract with Dark Handsome was nearly impossible to resist.

Our relationship was almost undone by a voluptuous Blackberry Curve, barely used, in a ravenous plum outfit. I examined every inch of the Curve's body as I took pictures, and made a conscious decision to make the phone mine. Later, I sat at my computer, Dark Handsome innocently asleep in my purse, hungrily staring at the Curve's eBay page with my finger on the trigger of my mouse—just one click and it would be mine.

However, I didn't do it. I remained faithful to my Dark Handsome. I would like to say that I chose to stay loyal to my beloved phone out of selfless love and devotion, but that wouldn't be honest. The truth was, I was broke. I simply couldn't afford to satiate every desire I had for bigger and better pieces of technology—I would die penniless. After all, why should I lust after new phones when I had a perfectly nice phone waiting for me at home? I chose to respect my contract with Dark Handsome, and will be staying with him through the year and a half until our agreement expires. Still, I am remaining with Dark Handsome more out of convenience and obligation than love. I am sure that Dark Handsome knows this, but he doesn't seem to mind.

My rocky relationship with Dark Handsome does not bode well for my ability to maintain a healthy relationship with any normal human being of the opposite sex. Dark Handsome is a simple partner to live with; he mostly sits silently by my desk and does not require a superfluous amount of attention. Men, on the other hand, are considerably more complicated—they don't appreciate being forgotten in the car overnight and become quite irate when one presses on the side of their face to quiet them when they are making too much noise. If I am having difficulty with a two-year relationship with an

inanimate piece of technology, how will I ever survive a relationship with a human man, the end of which is not marked by the option of upgrading but rather death? Admittedly, it will be tricky.

However, Dark Handsome and I are still together today, taking our relationship one day at a time. It is difficult, as most relationships are, and requires compromises on both of our parts. I am learning to look past his minor facial disfigurements, and his charge seems to have regained some of its stamina. He has taught me many lessons about patience, compromise, budgeting, and keeping multiple chargers in various locations at all times.

Thus, Dark Handsome has offered a glimmer of hope for my romantic future. Perhaps maintaining a level of sanity through relationships like the one with Dark Handsome can, over time, make me more able to commit to an actual, living human being. It is entirely possible that after my signature etches itself to the tails of enough successful cell phone contracts I will finally be able to stand at the business end of an alter without vomiting or fleeing. And maybe, just maybe, I will be psychologically able to sufficiently handle the marriage that will, ultimate, follow the dreaded wedding. It all depends, I believe, on Dark Handsome.

In the meantime, I will be holding onto both of my kidneys.

photography

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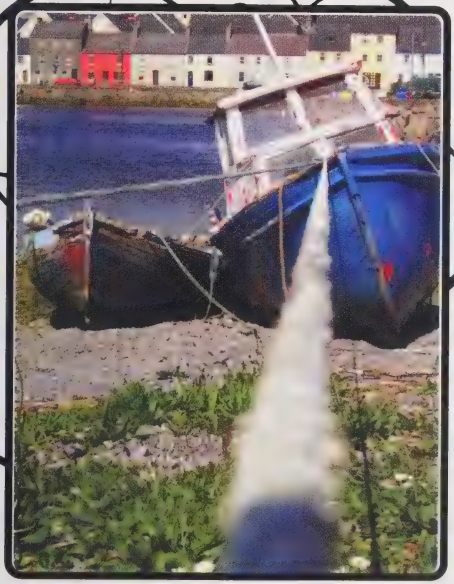

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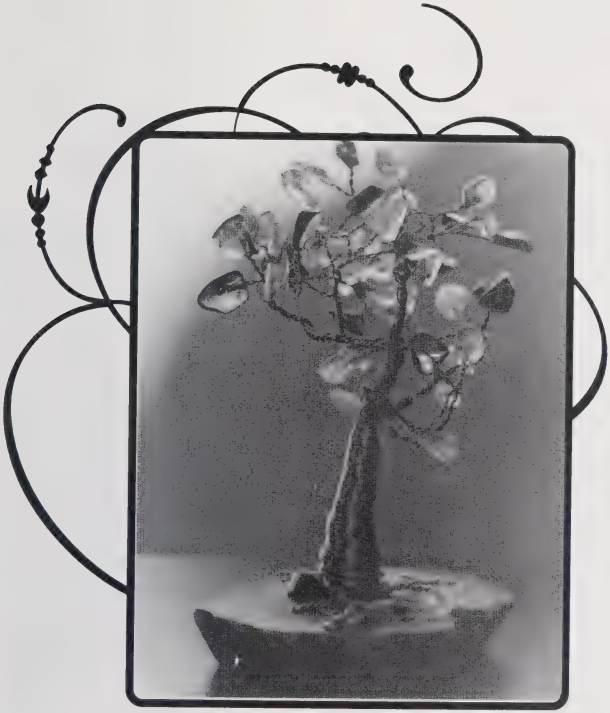
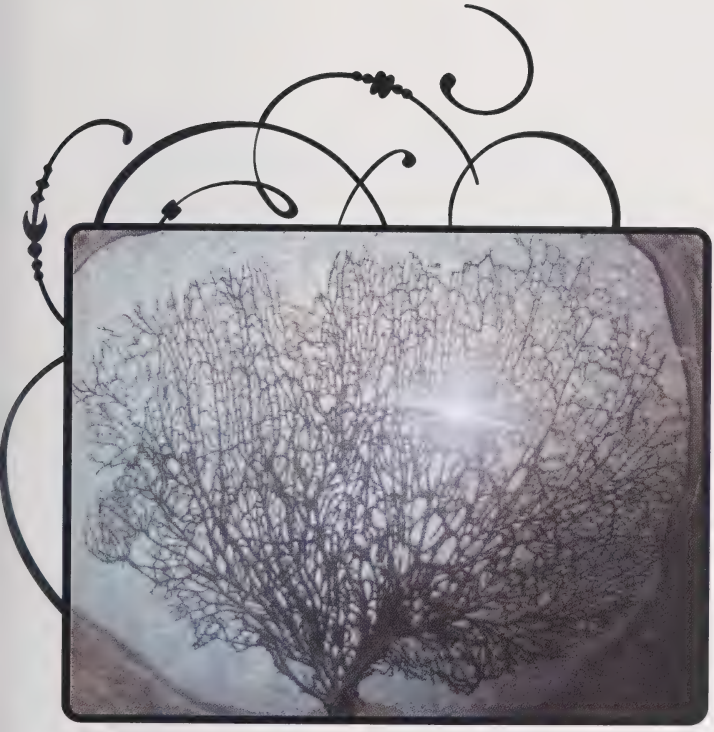


Lauren DeReese

Leslie Pitman



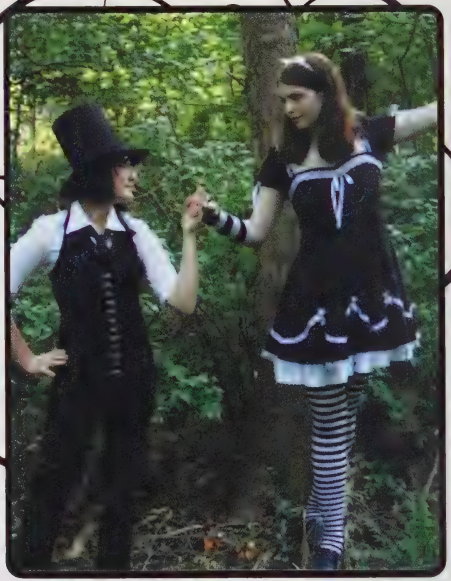
Lauren Weathers

Lauren DeReese

Josi Bloch

Jennifer Sprouse

Melissa Wilds



Melissa Wilds

Lauren Weathers

Jennifer Sprouse

Lauren Weathers

Justin Barker

Lauren Weathers

Nicole Beno

Jennifer Sprouse

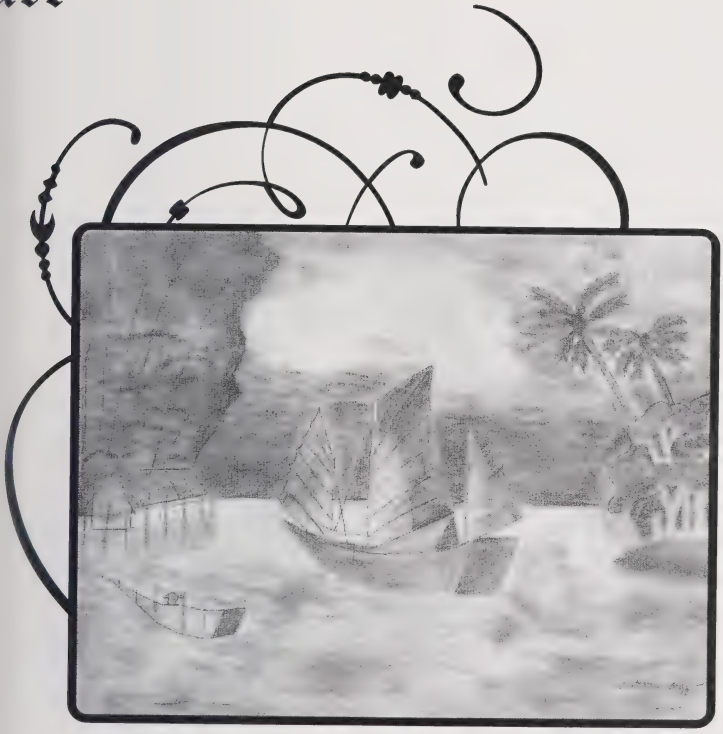
Leslie Pitman

Justin Barker

Leslie Pitman

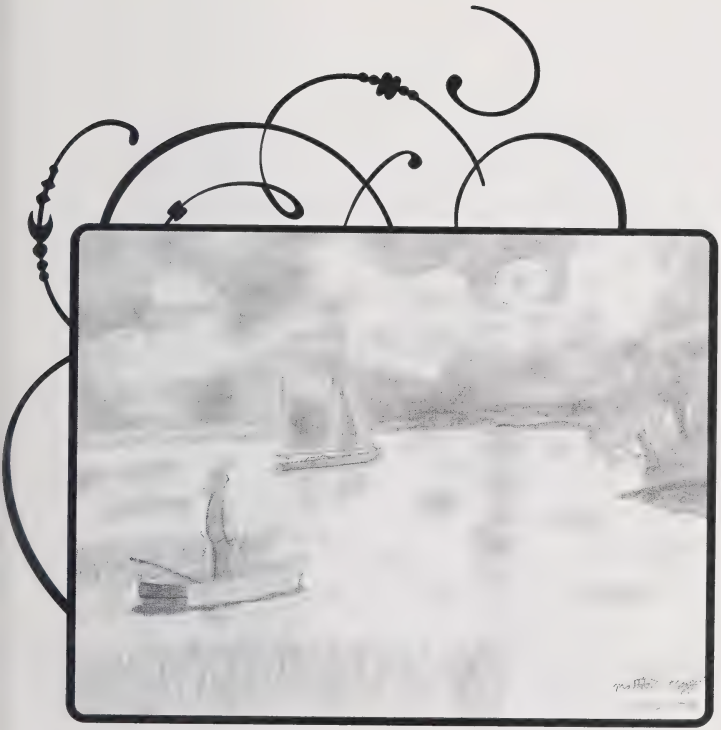
Justin Barker

Jennifer Sprouse



Matt Mozzo

Justin Lafreniere



Matt Mozzo

Matt Mozzo

Sarah Smith

Justin Lafreniere

Justin Lafreniere